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**Governor Brian Schweitzer Welcomes Visitors to the Big Sky State: “Montana is Open for Business”**

*Isolated Forest Fires Affecting Less Than 1% of the State*

(HELENA) – With all the recent media attention, you’d think Montana was ablaze from end to end, top to bottom. But the reality is far from this dramatized, Armageddon image.

Despite isolated forest fires currently burning in western Montana, over 99.7 percent of the state remains open to visitors looking to experience the Big Sky state’s beauty and serenity.

“Over 99% of Montana is open for business,” said Governor Brian Schweitzer. “Fires are a natural part of the cycle of our forests and have been occurring every year for thousands of years, and this year is no different. We welcome folks from around the world to enjoy the splendor of Montana, what you’ll find is a place filled with wonderful people, magnificent scenery and plenty of things to do.”

“Both Glacier and Yellowstone National Parks are fully open with visitors enjoying their vacations completely unimpeded by the dispersed fires in the state,” said Anthony Preite Director of the Montana Department of Commerce. “Our summer tourism season is strong this year, with above average reservations for both parks.”

Summer in Montana is the picture of “purple mountains, majesty.” With 147,000 square miles of rolling prairie, timbered river canyons, alpine mountain peaks, speckled with charming towns like Whitefish, Bigfork, Lewistown, Philipsburg, Red Lodge and many more, Montana offers an opportunity to experience a rarified slice of Rocky Mountain Americana. Book ended, north to south, by two of the United States’ most treasured

National Parks – Yellowstone and Glacier – Montana is a prime destination for travelers and vacationers looking to experience the beauty of natural landscapes along with a more relaxed pace than most places in the “real world.”

Forest and range fires are an important part of the natural processes that helps regenerate the land. Over the past ten years, with the northern Rocky Mountains experiencing on-going drought, forest fires have been more frequent. Though these fires are temporarily disruptive and sometimes damaging to private property, their long-term effects are generally quite positive for the ecology of the land and forests.

Almost 40% of Montana—nearly 37 million acres—is public land in Montana (national parks, national forests, national wildlife refuges, wilderness areas, Bureau of Land Management and so on), Montana is wilder and more undeveloped than most places in the lower 48 states. Montana is our 4<sup>th</sup> largest state with a total of 93 million acres to explore. It’s this openness and accessibility that makes Montana such a desired destination for Americans and travelers from all over the world looking to experience this unspoiled place.

The open, rural landscape also makes Montana more vulnerable to the natural process of forest fires. We have learned to accept wildfires as an inevitable result of living so close to natural and wild areas and our partners in the tourism industry work daily to provide our vacationers and travelers with the most current fire and air quality information.

**Useful website links:**

*State of Montana’s Official Tourism Website:* [www.visitmt.com](http://www.visitmt.com)

*Travel Montana Fire & Drought Information:* [www.visitmt.com/fire/conditions.htm](http://www.visitmt.com/fire/conditions.htm)

*Webcams:*

While certain areas of the state will periodically be impacted by smoke from wildfires, these web cams provide an opportunity to see first-hand that often the vast majority of Montana continues to be blanketed by its perennial blue skies.

<http://nps.gov/glac/photosmultimedia/webcams.htm>

<http://bigskyfishing.com/web-cams/web-cams.htm>

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